

Busy beehive on the Hill

Workers swarming to finish massive Capitol project

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As many as 400 workers are swarming in and around the Utah State Capitol, doing everything from pouring concrete for a new underground parking garage to applying real gold to ornate wall trims.



Mike Terry, Deseret MorningNews/KSL TV Chopper 5

The four-year \$200 million Capitol renovation project is set for completion by the end of this year.

"We're probably at the busiest of the busiest points we've been at on this job," said David Hart, executive director of the Capitol Preservation Board, which oversees the four-year, \$200 million renovation project set for completion by the end of the year.

Already, the final piece of the complicated seismic retrofit has been put in place in the basement of the stately granite structure. Within a month, the weight of the 80,000-ton building will be shifted from unreinforced concrete columns to nearly 300 base isolators.

That portion of the project, intended to protect the nearly 100-year-old building from earthquakes through a system of supports that will act as shock absorbers in a tremor, won't ever be seen by the public.

Much of the work that's being done now, though, will be noticed by visitors once the building is reopened for an open house in November — such as the sea gulls that have reappeared on the ceiling of the rotunda after being obscured by decades of smoke and dirt.

Not only are the full 4 feet or so of the birds' wingspan clearly visible now from the floor of the rotunda, so are details of the historic paintings beneath the dome. The sharper images and brighter colors are due to a restorative cleaning, Hart said.

The pink-and-blue trim on the walls of the building's majestic lobby — not to mention the orange-painted wings on the carved griffins and the soon-to-be-replaced rams' heads that will sport even more unusual colors — mirror the original tones used to decorate the Capitol.

That's also why there will be purple silk lining the walls of the historic Gold Room next to the Governor's Office. The room, which Hart hopes will be well-used as a reception area by state officials, takes its name from the gold-leaf trim all along the walls and ceiling.

The walls aren't painted gold, though, but a sort of greenish yellow that's historically accurate, too, according to Hart. Same with the mustard-yellow tones in the Attorney General's Office and the brown, leather-looking painted finish in the House.

It took scraping away decades of paint to find the original coloring for the building, Hart said, as well as extensive research that included buying old catalogs on eBay and examining black-and-white photographs to determine the lightness or darkness of a particular color.

Just about every door in the building will be made of metal hand-painted to look like mahogany wood. Although many pioneer-era projects had finishes intended to simulate more expensive materials, the original doors were painted metal to improve fire-proofing.

Within the next month, Hart said all of the office walls throughout the building should be up and ready for doors. Until the doors — with locks — are in place, no carpets, light fixtures or furniture can be brought in.

Hart's goal is to duplicate the work of the building's original architect, Utahn Richard Kletting, and site designer, John Olmsted, son of the famed landscape architect behind Central Park in New York City, Frederick Law Olmsted.

About the only question Hart is unable to answer during a recent tour is what won't be replicated. Even new balconies complete with granite balusters along the east and west sides of the Capitol were part of the early plans.

That kind of attention to detail could slow the project, but Hart said it'll be done on time.

The only potential problem at this point is the pair of lion statues that flanked side entrances. The original concrete statues were in such disrepair that an out-of-state artist was hired to re-create them in marble.



Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News

Dave Hart, director of the Capitol Preservation Board, points out details around the Capitol dome and paintings in the rotunda. The sharper images and brighter colors are due to a good cleaning.

But because the massive blocks of stone that had to be delivered from Italy were unexpectedly delayed, Hart said that as of last week, the sculptor had barely had time to begin chipping away.

An open house is scheduled from Nov. 19 through Dec. 1 to give the public a chance to peek at private office space before state officials move in from their temporary quarters in adjacent office buildings on the Capitol Complex.

The rededication of the building is set for Jan. 4, 2008, Utah's statehood day. The 2008 Legislature, which begins in mid-January, plans to meet in the Capitol for the first time since 2004.